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ABSTRACT

The greatest impediment to the provision of adequate and appropriate campus services for commuter students is their diversity. It is important to identify the needs of commuting students since they may have little interest in traditional campus programs and services. Though they are an extremely diverse population, nontraditional commuting students tend to be independent, older, and part-time. This study evaluated the administrative support and advising needs of 295 students enrolled in Wichita State University evening classes during the 1996 Spring semester. Students were asked if they used certain services at least once a semester at night, and if not, if they would like to use those services at night. Questionnaires were completed through telephone surveys; a sample of the script question is included and six tables illustrate student responses. The results indicate that only a few services were used at night, but students would have liked to use many more. Ironically, many of the services that students indicated they would like to use were already available during selected evening hours throughout the semester. The outcome of the study suggests that literature should be distributed to evening students to increase their awareness of the availability of existing evening campus programs. (LSR)

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Report on Service Needs of Evening Students at Wichita State University

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Report on Service Needs of Evening Students at Wichita State University

Meeting the needs of students is a challenge for student affairs practitioners and others concerned with the deliver of services on college campuses. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) point out that needs assessments are conducted since campus resources are limited and interventions are planned with the hope that they will be useful and popular. It is especially difficult to identify the needs of commuting students since they tend to be extremely diverse, representing a wide constellation of personal characteristics and interests Rhatigan, 1986). "The diversity of commuter students is quite notable, but there is a tendency for them to be independent, older, and part time" (Banning and Hughes, 1986, p. 18).

Among the nontraditional, commuting population of students are women. Between 1972 and 1987 the fastest growing group of college students was made up of women over age thirty-five (Ramirez, 1993). "Older students may have little interest in traditional campus program and services. They may require assistance, however, in developing a coherent academic program that builds on priori experience and courses at other institutions" (El-Khawas, 1996, p. 70).

Another important subset of commuting students are those attending college on a part time basis. Frequently, these students hold full time jobs during the day and attend college at night. "Part-time students have been a major factor ion maintaining enrollments, accounting for 39 percent of all students in 1976. In 1988, the figure rose to 43 percent" (Kuh, 1990, citing the Chronicle of Higher Education, 1988)

The needs of nontraditional, commuting students are difficult to identify since many such students have multiple life roles, including that of parent and full

time employee (Rhatigan, 1986). In fact, the greatest impediment to successful programming for commuter students, many of whom tend to be older than the traditional age of college students, tends to be their diversity (Wilmes & Quade, 1986). Even with this diversity, it is possible that a certain cluster of needs for campus services could be identified using a thoughtful, systematic approach.

The Academic Operations Council (AOC) at Wichita State University (WSU) is designed to review a variety of procedures at the University including determining ways to streamline administrative policies and services for students. At the March, 1996, meeting of the AOC, discussion centered on the needs of students who are enrolled in classes at the University only at night. Evening WSU students primarily are older, part time, commuter students (average age of 35, average course load of 4.57 hours, 80% listing a permanent address from the metropolitan Wichita area [Office of the Registrar, 1995]). The needs of such students, in the view of some members of the AOC, were not being met well since some offices and services were not available at night. Other AOC members observed that while their offices are open on certain evenings, the number of students using these evening services was small. In addition, it was pointed out that as greater use is made of technology, there is less need to keep an office open beyond traditional working hours. An example of this kind of service is touch tone registration, which students can use from their homes at any time of day or night, as long as they have the appropriate technology and meet the criteria for registration.

As the discussion continued, it became clear that the best way to identify the needs of evening students would be to ask them, in a systematic way, what their needs were, rather than relying on anecdotal information. With that in mind this study was commissioned. Its purpose was to evaluate the administrative support and advising needs of students enrolled in Wichita State University only at night

during the Spring, 1996, semester

Method

Several options were considered in gathering data for this study. Among these options were conducting a paper and pencil survey, assembling focus groups, or visiting evening classes and conducting discussions with the students. In the end the decision was made to enlist the services of the Interdisciplinary Communication Research Institute (ICRI), which is housed in the WSU Elliott School of Communication and is directed by Dr. Philip Gaunt. The ICRI conducts telephone surveys for a variety of organizations and has professionally trained staff to conduct research of this type.

An instrument with a number of questions for the students was prepared specifically for this study. The questionnaire was constructed to include as many services as possible that potentially might be used by evening students and to ask the respondents if they had used the service at least once a semester after 5:00 p.m. while enrolled in the University. If the respondent's answer was "no," then they were asked if they would like to able to use the service after 5:00 p.m. The questionnaire was prepared by the author of this report and was reviewed by the Dean of University College, the Associate Vice President for Retention Services and the Associate Vice President for Campus Life. Modifications to the original instrument were made after consulting with these people.

The population for this study consisted of all students enrolled only in night courses (defined as beginning at 4:30 p.m. or later) at Wichita State University during the Spring semester of 1996. Students enrolled in both day and evening courses were not included. A total of 2,110 students were identified as meeting the criteria for the study by the WSU Computing Center. From this list, 408 potential respondents were selected for inclusion in the study using random sampling

techniques.

During April, 1996, these students were contacted by the ICRI and were asked series of questions. A sample copy of the script for the beginning part of the telephone interview is attached to this report as Appendix 1.

All data were analyzed by the ICRI. Selected demographic information was collected about each of the respondents and summarized. Frequency distributions were prepared on an item by item basis. Cross tabulations using the participant's college of enrollment (Engineering, Business, Fine Arts, etc.) and class status (freshman, sophomore, etc.) as independent variables also were computed.

Results

A total of 295 students participated in this study for a response rate of 72.3%. More women than men responded, and the college with the largest number of respondents was Liberal Arts and Sciences. Senior status was the most common class standing of the participants. Virtually all of the respondents were enrolled at the main campus, although 29 reported being enrolled at the Westside Center and 20 were enrolled in the Downtown Campus. Some students were enrolled at more than one campus. A summary of the demographic information about the respondents is included in Table 1.

Among the services the students reported using most frequently were the following:

Using the main library;

Studying on campus;

Using the bookstore at the CAC;

Using the Heskett Center;

Ordering food at the CAC; and

Using the computer lab at the Computer Center.

Those services which the students reported using infrequently included the following:

Using the Child Development Center;

Using the writing labs with a tutor;

Getting assistance at the Resource Center for Independence; and

Going to Operation Success for Assistance.

These data are summarized in Table 2.

If the students indicated that they had not used the service at least once a semester at night, they were asked if they would like to use the service at night. Among the services that students would like to use at night were the following:

Using the services of the Graduate School;

Receiving assistance at the Office of Financial Aid;

Conferring with staff at the Office of Career Services; and

Using the Student Health Service.

These data are summarized in Table 3.

The issue of academic advising has specific implications for the various academic colleges. Tables 4 and 5 provide information about the extent to which students have used, or would like to use, the services of academic advisers at night. In general, a majority of respondents indicated that they have not used these services. However, a majority reported they would like to use advising services at night with the exception of student from the Graduate School and the College of Engineering. Please note that only two students from University College (UC) participated in this study, so the results for UC are virtually meaningless.

The analysis of the results using class standing as an independent variable generated only a few trends. For the most part, freshmen and sophomores reported more interest in using most services at night, while graduate students seemed to be

the least interested in using services at night. Some of the highlights of this aspect of the study are included in Table 6.

Discussion

This study was designed to identify the needs of evening students, defined as those who only enroll in classes beginning at 4:30 p.m. or later, at Wichita State University. Using the ICRI, students were contacted during April, 1996 and asked if they used certain services at least once a semester at night, and if not, if they would like to able to use the service at night. The results indicated that only a few services are used at night, but students would like to use many more in the evening.

Ironically, many of the services students indicated they would like to use at night are available during selected evening hours throughout the semester. For example, advising services are available until 7:00 p.m. on Monday and Tuesday in the Barton School of Business. Consequently, if this study revealed a problem it might very well be that students are not aware of the services available at night on campus. This was the conclusion reached in the discussion of the results of this study at the Academic Operations Council. One of the recommendations of the Council is that a simple listing of services and evening office hours be distributed to students enrolled in night classes, perhaps during the first week of the semester. This information was assembled in the form of a brochure and has been made available to evening students during the Fall, 1996, semester. Another option would be to provide such a list in the Schedule of Courses, although that approach assumes that students keep the schedule after they have registered. The Council agreed to examine these approaches, and perhaps others, at future meetings.

As is the case with any study of this type, there are certain limitations. The views of these respondents may not be representative of all evening students. Additionally, new students enroll every semester, so it is possible that the needs of

the students identified in April, 1996, may not reflect student needs in subsequent semesters. Moreover, some of the office titles used in conducting the survey may not have been familiar to students who think about offices in functional terms. For example, students with disabilities may not know that the actual title of the office which provides special services for such individuals is the "Resource Center for Independence."

Nonetheless, this report provides the first systematic look at the needs of evening students for a number of years. The action step the study pointed to has the potential to provide better information and service for evening students attending the University.

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Table 1

Demographic Information for Students
Participating in this Study

Item	Number	Percent*
Gender		
Female	189	64.5
Male	104	35.5
Total	293	100.0
Academic College		
Graduate School	21	7.1
Barton School of Business	59	20.0
College of Education	45	15.3
College of Engineering	37	12.6
College of Fine Arts	18	6.1
College of Health Professions	39	13.2
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences	74	25.1
University College	2	.7
Total	295	100.1
Year in School		
Freshman	7	2.4
Sophomore	41	13.9
Junior	59	20.0
Senior	148	50.2
Graduate	38	12.9
Non-degree	2	.7
Total	295	100.1
Campus Attended		
Southside	7	2
Downtown	20	5.6
Westside	29	8.8
Main Campus	288	81.1
Other	11	3.1
Total	355**	100.6

*Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding

**Some students were enrolled at more than one campus

Table 2
Services Used at Least Once Per Semester

Service	Yes	Percent	No	Percent
Use the main library	266	90.2	29	9.8
Study on Campus	253	86.1	41	13.9
Use the Bookstore in the CAC	205	69.5	90	30.5
Use the Heskett Center	166	56.3	129	43.7
Order food at the CAC	154	52.2	141	47.8
Use the computer lab at the computing center	128	43.4	167	56.6
Register for classes	107	36.4	187	63.6
Confer with an academic adviser	82	27.9	212	72.1
Drop or add a course	77	26.1	218	73.9
Get information at Informed Sources	72	24.4	223	75.6
Get a parking decal	65	22.0	230	78.0
Look at the part time job listings	56	19	239	81.0
Pay bills at the Controller's Office	49	16.6	246	83.4
Received assistance at financial aid	42	14.2	253	85.8
Use the math lab	36	12.2	259	87.8
Confer with staff at Career Services	33	11.2	262	88.8
Go the Learning Resource Center	32	10.8	263	89.2
Use the services of the graduate school office	32	10.8	263	89.2
Order a Transcript	31	10.5	264	89.5
Get an identification card	28	9.5	267	90.5
Go to the Counseling Center	25	8.5	270	91.5
Use the Student Health Service	23	7.8	272	92.2
Go to Operation Success for assistance	16	5.4	278	94.6
Use the writing labs with a tutor	13	4.4	282	95.6
Get assistance at the Resource Center for Independence	12	4.1	283	95.9
Use the child development center	9	3.0	286	97.0

Table 3
Services Respondents Would Like to Use At Least Once Each Semester*

Service	Yes	Percent	No	Percent
Use the services of the graduate school office	150	57.3	112	42.7
Received assistance at financial aid	149	58.9	104	41.1
Confer with staff at Career Services	147	56.1	115	43.9
Use the Student Health Service	143	52.6	129	47.4
Drop or add a course	140	64.2	78	35.8
Pay bills at the Controller's Office	136	55.1	111	44.9
Confer with an academic Adviser	134	62.6	80	37.4
Get an identification card	130	48.7	137	51.3
Order a Transcript	124	47.0	140	53.0
Register for classes	122	64.9	66	35.1
Go the Learning Resource Center	111	42.2	152	57.8
Look at the part time job listings	110	46.0	129	54.0
Go to the Counseling Center	109	40.4	161	59.6
Go to Operation Success for assistance	109	39.2	169	60.8
Get a parking decal	107	47.0	123	53.0
Get information at Informed Sources	104	46.6	119	53.4
Use the writing labs with a tutor	100	35.5	182	64.5
Use the math lab	95	36.7	164	63.3
Get assistance at the Resource Center for Independence	92	32.7	189	67.3
Use the computer lab at the computing center	91	54.8	75	45.2
Order food at the CAC	81	56.6	62	43.4
Use the Heskett Center	78	60.5	51	39.5
Use the child development center	77	26.9	209	73.1
Use the Bookstore in the CAC	64	71.1	26	28.9
Use the main library	20	69.0	9	31.0
Study on Campus	13	31.0	29	69.0

*Not every student answering "no" to the items in Table 2 responded to the items listed in this table.

Table 4
Academic Advising Services Used Once Per Semester

College	Yes	Percent	No	Percent
Graduate School (N=21)	9	43.0	12	57.0
Barton School of Business (N=59)	22	37.0	37	63.0
College of Education (N=45)	10	22.0	35	78.0
College of Engineering (N=37)	11	30.0	26	70.0
College of Fine Arts (N=18)	5	28.0	13	72.0
College of Health Prof. (N=38)	9	24.0	29	76.0
College of LAS (N=74)	16	22.0	58	78.0
University College (N=2)	0		2	100
Total (N=294)	82	28.0	212	72.0

Table 5
Academic Advising Services
Respondents Would Like to Use Each Semester

College	Yes	Percent	No	Percent
Graduate School (N=12)	4	33.0	8	67.0
Barton School of Business (N=37)	25	68.0	12	32.0
College of Education (N=35)	26	74.0	9	26.0
College of Engineering (N=27)	12	44.0	15	56.0
College of Fine Arts (N=13)	11	85.0	2	15.0
College of Health Prof. (N=30)	16	53.0	14	47.0
College of LAS (N=58)	38	66.0	20	34.0
University College (N=2)	2	100	0	
Total (N=214)	134	63.0	80	37.0

Table 6

Items Where 50% or More of Respondents Replied Favorably to the Item by Class Standing

Item	Class Stranding*
Would like to order a transcript	FR, SO
Would like to order an ID Card	FR
Would like to confer with academic advisor	All but FR
Would like to use Ablah library	All but SO
Have registered for classes at night	GRAD
Would like to use Student Health Service	All but GRAD
Would like to received assistance at Financial Aid	All but GRAD
Have used computer lab	SO
Would like to use computer lab	All but JU
Would like to go to Counseling Center	FR, SO
Would like to pay bills at Controller's Office	All but GRAD
Would like to receive parking decal	SO, JU, GRAD
Have ordered food at CAC	SE, GRAD
Would like to order food at CAC	All but GRAD
Have used Heskett Center	SO, SE, GRAD
Would like to use Heskett Center	All but GRAD
Would like to confer with staff at Career Services	All but GRAD
Would like to look at part-time job listings	FR,SO, JU

*FR=Freshmen; SO=Sophomores; JU=Juniors; SE=Seniors; GRAD=Graduate Students

Table 6, Continued

Item	Class Standing*
Would like to use Math Lab	SO
Would like to receive information at Informed Sources	FR, SO
Would like to study on campus	FR
Would like to Operation Success for assistance	SO
Would like to use Bookstore at the CAC	All but FR
Would like to use the writing lab	FR, SO

*FR=Freshmen; SO=Sophomores; JU=Juniors; SE=Seniors; GRAD=Graduate Students

Appendix 1

Sample Script Question

Evening Student University Services Survey

Hello, may I speak with _____.
Good afternoon/evening. My name is _____. I am calling on behalf of WSU's Student Services. I would like to ask you a few questions about the University's services that you use and those you would LIKE to use AFTER 5:00 p.m. This survey will only take a few minutes. The information YOU provide is strictly confidential and will be used to help WSU's Student Services determine the needs of night time students. Would you agree to help? Great. Let's get started. Here is the first question:
At least once a semester in the evening (AFTER 5:00) have you..
ordered a transcript?